

on the move

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North Carolina A&T State University
School of Agriculture and
Environmental Sciences
Newsletter
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SAES Agricultural Research Program to be major partner in \$25 million initiative

Food safety scientists

know a lot about foodborne bacteria such as Salmonella, E.coli, Listeria and Campylobacter. Noroviruses, on the other hand, are entirely different microorganisms and have evaded their best efforts to isolate, grow and study in the laboratory — which makes prevention and control difficult. Now answers are on the horizon, thanks to a \$25 million multi-institution project from the USDA to investigate this leading cause of foodborne illness in the United States.

The SAES's Center for Excellence in Post-Harvest Technologies (CEPHT) has been named a key partner in the wide-reaching, five-year project to be led by N.C. State, in partnership with A&T and 28 other institutions across the country from academia, industry and government.

"Norovirus is a huge issue, and requires a large, multi-disciplinary team such as this to develop solutions," says Dr. Leonard Williams. As lead scientist for food safety and microbiology and interim director at CEPHT, Williams is in charge of A&T's norovirus team, and will be responsible for developing prevention and control strategies.

Though it is the leading cause of foodborne illness in the United States affecting

approximately 5 million people a year, norovirus is not as dangerous as some other foodborne pathogens that make headlines. Symptoms are relatively mild, with otherwise healthy victims usually shaking off an upset stomach or diarrhea in a day or two. Nevertheless, better controls are needed because norovirus is difficult to eradicate, highly contagious, and spreads quickly

each year are due to norovirus infection, and more than 50 percent of all foodborne disease outbreaks can be attributed to noroviruses.

As the developer of control strategies, the CEPHT's part of the norovirus project will be to apply its expertise in microbiology to developing a new technology to deactivate norovirus, including products from natural

or plant-based materials for food, hand and surface decontamination. In his role as CEPHT's lead scientist for food engineering, Dr. Guibing Chen could then apply his expertise in "micro-encapsulation," a technology which uses minute capsules for timed release or to stabilize active ingredients for longer shelf life. Other units at CEPHT could potentially play a role as the project unfolds. Scientists will also develop nanotechnology-based post-harvest processes to reduce or eliminate norovirus contamination on fruits and vegetables. Finally, they will validate the study's findings in real-

world settings, such as food processing plants.

"Validating the efficacy or feasibility in food processing settings will be an important step to developing control strategies," Williams says.



Dr. Williams examines a petri dish in the lab.

through hospitals, nursing homes, cruise ships, and other public settings where food is served. In the United States, CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) estimates that more than 21 million cases of acute gastroenteritis

The Randle Report

Since I arrived Sept. 1, I have indeed been on the move. There is so much to discover, decipher and understand. I'm learning new names; getting a full understanding of how things are done at A&T and seeing how the SAES functions as part of the state's land-grant system.

But I feel very fortunate to be here. I come in knowing that the SAES received one-third of the University's external grants. I know that we have one of the largest schools of agriculture among the country's HBCUs and that we are just behind the University of Florida in the number of minority graduates with degrees in agriculture. I know that agriculture plays a major role in this state and that A&T is doing quality work to support that effort and to support this state's farmers, many of whom run small operations and are working to diversify their offerings.

As I've said to the groups I've had the opportunity to visit, I work for you and I intend to spend the time that it takes to meet all the players, both internal and external, learn what is happening and begin moving to the next level. We will also play a role in the development of Preeminence 2020, the University's strategic plan.

Although some things are new to me at A&T, there are some things at land grants and universities in general, that are the same. A major constant is accountability. We will continue to work to make sure we are accountable for the resources that are entrusted to us. We will continue to share with you — the public — the stories of how the work we are doing, especially in research and Cooperative Extension, is making a difference in the lives of the people of this state. We will work to make sure that our students leave the SAES prepared to take the next step. And we will work to build an SAES that is focused on the future.

I assure you that I, and we in the SAES, will remain on the move.

— **Dr. Bill Randle**, Dean,
School of Agriculture and
Environmental Sciences



Dr. William Randle

School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences sets out welcome mat for new dean

As noted in his inaugural column on the front page of this issue of *on the move*, Dr. William “Bill”

involve input from almost every member of the staff,” Randle says. “But once the new strategic plan is ready to roll out, we will once again have a road map to turn to for all our major decisions.”

Originally from northern Illinois, Randle went on from high school to make horticulture the backbone of his academic work as he earned a bachelor’s at the University of Arizona, a master’s at Michigan State and a doctorate at the University of Minnesota.

His land-grant career began at LSU, where he was part of a team of scientists that developed and released the “Beauregard” sweet potato that’s now the most popular variety grown in the United States. The next port for Randle’s career in plant breeding R&D was Basic American Foods in California, where he was director of variety development for a food processing company that’s among the world’s leading suppliers

encompassed, “Graduate and undergraduate courses; introductory as well as advanced.” A feature story about him in the departmental newsletter lends support to that summary in a paragraph that begins “Teaching has been the main focus of Dr. Randle’s career,” and then goes on to provide specific support with a sentence listing a classroom instruction resume that includes horticultural physiology and plant propagation.

For several years Randle was the graduate coordinator for the Department of Horticulture at Georgia, but the same 2004 newsletter story describing his commitment to training the next generation of scientists begins with the observation, “When you think of Bill Randle, onions come to mind.” That collective reaction to mention of the name “Bill Randle” was a consequence of his work with the Vidalia onion industry that had major newspapers calling him

the University of Georgia’s “onion flavor expert” and trade publications recognizing that methodologies developed by Randle had become the rules

and regulations used by the Georgia State Department of Agriculture to designate what is (and isn’t) a Vidalia onion.

Randle comes to the SAES from The Ohio State University, where he has served as chair of the Horticulture and Crop Science Department since 2006.

Randle stepped in as dean of the SAES on Sept. 1. He brings a broad background to the administrative suite at Webb Hall. In a career that has taken him to three of the nation’s preeminent land-grant institutions — Louisiana State, Georgia and Ohio State — Randle has distinguished himself as a researcher, instructor and administrator. His CV also includes impressive credentials in international agriculture, cutting-edge technology and a stint in private sector agribusiness. And although he’s never been on the payroll of a Cooperative Extension unit, his research work in support of Georgia’s Vidalia onion industry — when Vidalias were catching momentum with consumers nationwide — made him such a go-to guy for media relations and support for frontline Extension work that his understanding of the outreach facet of the land-grant mission is comprehensive.

Randle pinpoints a top priority among his extensive slate of SAES responsibilities with the reassurance that “My job is to be an advocate for the School; I work for the faculty and staff.” He has three enthusiastic bullets to tick off when asked what he has found most appealing about the SAES. He says, “First of all, its diversity and history.” He then adds, “I think there’s great potential. We’re positioned to make a big step forward.”

A specific priority that Randle has been quick to mention in making the rounds to introduce himself to SAES faculty and staff is a new long-term strategic plan, a successor to Planning for Our Preferred Future that was unveiled at the start of the 2005–06 academic year. “The new strategic plan is going to take a lot of work, and it’s going to

My job is to be an advocate for the School; I work for the faculty and staff.

of dried potato and bean products. In 1989 he launched an 18-year career at the University of Georgia, where he was a plant breeder and geneticist with the Department of Horticulture.

Randle summarizes his teaching career at Georgia and elsewhere as one that has

Thomas Pierce, a Martin County farmer, was the 2011 N.C. A&T Small Farmer of the Year.



The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T has set 25 – 31 as Small Farms Week 2012. The nomination deadline for the 2012 North Carolina Small Farmer of the Year award has been set: Wednesday, October 30. The award will be presented

A&T University Farm to offer free workshops in small farm management

The University Farm will host three workshops for small-scale farmers and vegetable growers during the 2011–12 academic year that will be led by members of the Agricultural Research Program faculty.

Free and open to the public, the workshops are designed especially for small-scale vegetable or livestock enterprises that are just getting started, as well as community gardeners, or home vegetable gardeners who want to improve production. All three workshops will be held from 8:30–11:30 a.m. at the University Farm, 3136 McConnell in Greensboro.

“A&T’s School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences is seeing a revival of interest from very diverse segments of the community in local foods, home gardening, community gardening and growing for profit through farmers markets or roadside stands. This workshop series at the University Farm has been designed to respond to their needs,” said Dr. Shirley Hymon-Parker, associate dean for the Agricultural Research Program.

Workshops in the series are:

- **Record Keeping for Small Growers**, Thursday, Oct. 20. Attendees will learn how to set up a bookkeeping system that works for each enterprise. Registration is requested by Monday, Oct. 17. To register, contact Sandra Simmons at (336) 285-4721, or srsimmon@ncat.edu.
- **Tools of the Trade**, Thursday, Jan. 19, will introduce the use and maintenance of fencing and other equipment that is needed to start a small livestock or vegetable growing business. Registration is requested by Tuesday, Jan. 17. To register, contact Jean Reese at (336) 334-7548 or jgreese@ncat.edu.
- **Improve Your Soil With Cover Crops**, Thursday, May 17. Attendees will learn what cover crops are appropriate for North Carolina, and how they can reduce weeds and labor while improving soil. Registration is requested by Monday, May 14. To register, contact Dr. Charles Raczkowski at (336) 334-7779 or raczkowc@ncat.edu.

Small Farmer of the Year!

on Small Farms Day (March 28, 2012) to a family farm in North Carolina that exemplifies success, innovation and leadership in small-scale agriculture. To be eligible, farmers must generate at least half their gross income from farming, have averaged less than \$250,000 in annual gross farm revenue over the last three years, and the farm must be one with a family member making general management decisions. Nomination forms are available at the SAES website, www.ag.ncat.edu.



Dr. Sekai Turner

Dr. Sekai Turner has joined The Cooperative Extension Program as the 4-H Youth Development Specialist. Turner graduated with honors from Spelman College, and earned her doctoral degree in human development from the University of Maryland, College Park. She also has a master's in social work from the University of Pittsburgh and a master's of professional studies in Africana Studies from Cornell. Her research and programmatic interests include child and adolescent development, parenting influences, the intersection between health and education, school- and community-based interventions, and youth leadership.



Dr. Jenell Kelly

Dr. Jenell Kelly has joined The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T as a family and human development specialist. Kelly holds a bachelor's in sociology and master's and doctoral degrees in human and community development from the University of Illinois. Kelly has experience working with children, youth and adults in multiple capacities. She has worked with organizations such as the Urban League and Child Care Inc. as a family and human development specialist. In her work with A&T, Kelly will provide educational programs to limited-resource populations. Her areas of focus include parenting, youth development and aging.



Dr. Rosalind Dale

Dr. Rosalind Dale has joined The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T as a regional program coordinator. Dale comes to A&T from University of Illinois Extension, where she was most recently a district coordinator in Cook County/Chicago, responsible for providing leadership for program planning and delivery; identifying the needs of limited-resource families; and informing the public of Extension's local program efforts. She also provided leadership for Cook County's federally funded SNAP-Ed Program (Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program-Education). Dale has a bachelor's in nutrition from Benedictine University and also a bachelor's in home economics from Western Illinois University; a master's in human services administration from Spertus College; and a doctorate in adult and continuing education from National-Louis University.

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Re:search ready for review

The 2011 issue of the Agricultural Research Program's annual magazine, *Re:search*, will be mailed out in the next few weeks. An electronic copy is already available at the SAES Web page. This issue is supplemented with five articles on the facilities and scientists at the SAES's Center for Excellence in Post-Harvest Technologies in Kannapolis. It also has profiles of the four SAES students selected to inaugurate the new Undergraduate Research Scholars Program, and features recent developments in biofuel and edible mushroom research. Additional copies of *Re:search* can be obtained at the ARP Web page (http://www.ag.ncat.edu/research/re_search_magazine.html) or by calling 336.285.4701.

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